

## **AMERICANS INTERESTED IN THEIR FINNISH ANCESTRY**

Eskil Piira Family Society arranged a tour to the United States on June 12 – 20. It had two main themes. One theme was to meet descendants of the immigrants who mainly belong to the Piirainen family. The other one was to see New York, especially its heart Manhattan. There were 50 people from different parts of Finland in the group.

Immigration from Finland to the States was very active at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. On this tour we had the chance to meet the Piirainens who have settled in the states of Maine and Connecticut on the eastern coast of the USA. The receptions took place in the premises of the local Finnish American societies. The group also met local people and saw several local sights. In the cemeteries there were many Finnish names to be seen in the gravestones, including many Piirainens.

### **Meeting American cousins**

The group landed in Boston. From there we continued north to the little town of South Paris in Maine. There the local Piirainens had organized a warm-hearted welcoming party. Finnish-American Center was full of people and the table was groaning with good things.

We could experience the same in the Finnish Hall in Canterbury in Connecticut. There the older people could still speak some Finnish and a joyful hum at every table proved the strong feeling of togetherness. The group really felt themselves expected and respected guests. Mr. Robert Payne had come to meet us all the way from California.

Both Presidents of the Finnish American Heritage Societies received the table pennant of Eskil Piira Family Society. Kuhmon Keiketys, a folk dance group, performed at the receptions. Furthermore, Keiketys and the local A'Chording to Kantele group arranged a public concert in The Forum Oxford Hills High School in South Paris. The auditorium was full of people.

We also visited Veikko Piirainen, 91, in his farm in West Paris. This real superman and a keen motorist has just painted his big house, cut the hay and made firewood. In his garage we could see a Ford from 1929 among other things. Veikko is the uncle of Dale Piirainen, an active member of our society. Dale and his wife Loraine have attended several times at our family meetings in Kuhmo.

We spent three days in Maine. In the program we had a trip to Mt. Washington, visits to the Finnish cemeteries and Finnish Mission Church. Mr. Kari Karanko led community singing on several occasions. The Hymn *Maa on niin kaunis (Beautiful is the Earth)* in the cemetery brought tears to many eyes. In the church we sang *Jo joutui armas aika (trad. Finnish Summer Hymn)*. On Sunday we took part in the Holy Service at Trinity Lutheran Church and visited King Hill Cemetery and the Veterans' Memorial.

### **On the top of the world in Manhattan**

In New York we saw many of the sights in Manhattan. Sightseeing tour on the island gave us a general idea and then we could go shopping on our own. The skyscrapers made a strong impression. The program included a visit to The Headquarters of the United Nations, The New York Public Library and in the evening we saw the musical *Mamma Mia* in Broadhurst Theatre in Broadway. In the United Nations Headquarters we saw the Security Council Chamber and afterwards we had the

honor to meet and talk to Mr. Janne Taalas, the Ambassador, and some of his personnel at the reception of The Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations.

The tour leader was **Mr. Jorma Piirainen**, Honorary President of the Society. He was responsible for the planning and arrangements of the tour up to the smallest detail. He was assisted by **Mr. Jaakko Kampman**, the Vice President of the Society. **Mr. Kari Karanko**, a member of the Society, gave us valuable help and guiding in New York and the UN. **The Folk Dance Group Keiketys** offered a lot to see and hear as our gift to our hosts and hostesses. My sincere thanks to all of you.

**Dale and Loraine Piirainen** were mainly responsible for the program in West Paris. In accordance, we spent a very nice Saturday evening at their home. **Finnish American Heritage Society of Maine** and the staff and volunteers in the Center had made wonderful preparations for our visit. **The Finnish American Heritage Society of Canterbury** and the staff and volunteers of the Finnish Hall offered their best in Connecticut. **Richard and Robert Robertson** were our hosts and guides in Connecticut. Our warm thanks for your great hospitality.

Please visit the Picture Gallery to see the pictures from the tour.

Pekka Piironen  
President of Eskil Piira Family Society

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